

# FORESTS OF FLORIDA.

## A Weird Region Filled With Wild and Savage Animals.

## THE PARADISE FOR SPORTSMEN.

## Came Fish Abound in the Streams and Along the Coast Line.

## VAST SOUTHERN GRASSY SAVANNAS

Notwithstanding the steady exploration of Florida by scouts for land companies, railroad engineers, prospectors and phosphate searchers, the hunting grounds, yet there are thousands of square miles in the extreme southern portion of the State which are rarely trodden by the foot of the white man, and which are veritable zoological gardens in which feral animals are as tame as even they were in the island home of Robinson Crusoe.

The work of opening these wilds is now being pushed forward by drainage and canal companies, says a correspondent in the Washington Star, but it may be years before they can reclaim the vast southern savannas and render them fit for human habitation.

One of the wildest and weirdest regions thus far discovered in the State is the lake known as Lake Green swamp or Sawgrass lake, which has an area of at least 300 square miles and contains the finest body of cypress trees on this planet.

This is a genuine men's paradise, wild animals being numerous and so fearless through their unacquaintance with man that a hunter has actually to kick some of them out of his way before they will move.

Parakeets, scarlet and blue, are very common and move in dense flocks, like our common black birds; flamingoes, ibises, roseate spoonbills, pelicans and other aquatic and wading birds haunt the margins of the lake at all times, and raccoons, opossums, foxes, lynxes, otters, foxes and marsh hares are abundant enough to arouse the aversion of even an amateur trapper.

## Wild Animals There in Abundance.

Deer, bears and panthers are numerous on the uplands, and turkeys haunt the contiguous forests where mast is abundant. Snakes are also very numerous, and every water hole and clump of bushes seem to have its own colony. One is likely to see over 100 within an hour or two, and probably three times that number in a day. The most numerous species is the water and upland moccasin, but rattlesnakes are also very abundant, and king, whip, chicken and blacksnakes are frequently encountered. When the ophidians are thick they exhale a sickening odor, which produces vomiting in some persons, this being particularly true of rattlesnakes and copperheads.

The lake lost much of its water recently, owing to extremely warm weather and a scarcity of rain, and this forced the fish to seek refuge in shallow pools, where they furnished a feast for buzzards, crows and "possums," snakes and snappers. Thousands of fish could be seen flitting about in the last stage of exhaustion, while thousands more lay putrifying on the margins of the lake or were being devoured by foxes, crows or "possums."

The latter creatures had probably never seen a man until they met Judge Harrison's party, and they were so intimidated by the hunters of this expedition that they scarcely dared to glance at them as they passed by.

All animals in the region displayed the same fearlessness, the deer merely retreating from the hunters, and the turkeys, when they were killed, were found to be very tame.

## Many Nests of the Sawgrass.

The cone-like nests of the sawgrass are one of the most curious features of the landscape, as they are extraordinarily abundant and seem to have been in existence for many years. Young reptiles are, as a consequence, very common, and as they are always ready to bite, they are to be carefully not to approach them too closely.

One of them seized the trouser leg of a young man in Judge Harrison's exploring party, and he, in turn, was so frightened that he became almost insane with fear and dashed through brake and briar with a speed that could only be developed by terror, but as the young man clung to him with the tenacity of a sandpiper the fellow was not so easily dropping dead from horror as his friends overtook him and relieved him of his terrifying companion.

When rescued he was pale as the traditional ghost, the perspiration rolled off his body in streams, and he was so weak that he could scarcely stand or speak. It took him some time to recover from his needless terror, and he was many a day before he could calmly face the scenes of the land.

"Three-inch" gator, scaring a green Englishman to death.

The wild hogs so common on the Gulf coast of Florida have not yet migrated as far toward the interior as Sawgrass Lake, but some hunters hope they may soon find their way toward it in order to destroy the numerous snakes that make its borders a scene of horror.

## Mosquitoes Fly in Large Swarms.

Mosquitoes fly in swarms during the rainy season, and are so persistent in their attacks that explorers are compelled to make their beds two or more feet off the ground. These winged plagues, like the snakes, are in a state of hibernation during the winter, and do not appear in seriously annoying numbers until May or June.

Sportsmen can, therefore, safely visit this region between December and April, and revel in such venatic adventures as they never thought of in their wildest dreams. They must take guides with them, or they are likely to wander for days among the broad savannas, and never find a single drop of water, and to die of thirst.

The cypress trees alone are well worth a visit, as they are the largest in the State and compare favorably with some of the redwoods and spruces of the Pacific coast. Many of the giants are one mass of tillandsia, or Spanish moss, and present a funeral aspect in their dense covering of grayish black air plants, which are very abundant throughout the region, owing to the humidity of the atmosphere, and several species of flora unknown farther north are conspicuous in the forests. The large tracts adjoining the swamp are interesting to all students of nature, but no persons will extract as much delight from them as the lover of natural history and of the rod and gun.

## Nimrod Can Find Exercise.

Another reason why should prove exceedingly interesting to the disciples of Nimrod and Walton is New River inlet, in the extreme southern portion of Florida. This was a famous resort during the war for the deer hunters, and it was there that the deer who fled from the Confederate conscription. Many a dark deed is associated with the name of the place, for beach combers and pirates made it their headquarters during the early occupation of Florida by the United States, and they were not driven out until the Civil War was over. The inlet is famous for the vast quantities of fish and turtles which haunt it at all seasons of the year, and the readiness with which such species as the tarpon, jewfish, sea devil or vampire ray, barracuda, Spanish mackerel, tunny, dolphin and their Southern congeners may be captured at all stages of the tide.

It is one of the most noted places in the State for green turtles, large shoals being found there during stormy weather, owing to the protection which they find in them and the depth of its waters. It was formerly a great rendezvous for the Seminole Indians, when they were in their pristine glory and diving after turtles was one of their favorite summer amusements, and their principal means of filling their larder while they

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